

Indonesia: Merapi disaster appeal!

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MERAPI DISASTER APPEAL

When the government fails, the people must act

6 November 2010

The Alliance of People's Struggle (ARM), a coalition of womens', students', labour and peasant organisations, based in Yogyakarta is appealing for emergency aid to help people affected by the eruptions from Mount Merapi which is having its most violent eruptions in more than one hundred years. The most recent eruption on the morning of November 5 has already killed 58 people, injured dozens more and completely incinerated the village of Argomulya.

A spokesperson from the ARM Yayak Aslihul said "The situation in Yogyakarta is quickly becoming a humanitarian disaster. As well as the death toll of more than 100 people, more than 75,000 people have been evacuated from their homes with more than 30,000 people taking shelter in the Maguwoharip Soccer Stadium and thousands more are sheltering in universities throughout Yogyakarta. As well as the trauma of being evacuated from their homes the refugees are suffering from shortages of food, water and sanitary facilities and the local government's emergency funds are quickly running out".

"The humanitarian disaster caused by Merapi is a result of a failure by the national and local governments to take natural disaster management seriously. Authorities have long known that Merapi poses a serious threat to people living nearby, but the government has failed to adequately prepare in the event of an eruption. There has been no clear evacuation plan and steps have only been taken after each eruption, which is why more than 100 people have already died. Nor has the government provided adequate shelters instead waiting until tens of thousands of people were in desperate need of accommodation, they are now forced to sleep in the Maguwoharip Soccer Stadium which the government only chose after Merapi began erupting".



And while the local and national governments are clearly failing to deal with the disaster adequately the national government of Susilo Bambang Yudhono is still refusing to accept foreign aid. So far the Australian government has offered \$1 million, the US government US\$2 million and the European Commission 1.5 million euros. A spokesperson from the Foreign Ministry claims that the government still needs to assess the situation and will only accept the aid "If the damage requires large scale assistance and we cannot handle it on our own" showing that it is more concerned about presenting a false image of self-sufficiency in order to reassure foreign investors that Indonesia is a stable place for business than looking after the people affected by the disaster.

And while the government has agreed to channel any international donations to other organizations such as Indonesia's biggest Islamic organisation, Muhammadiyah and the Indonesian Red Cross, endemic corruption means that it is extremely unlikely that the funds will actually reach people in need. Governmental corruption and incompetency extends from the national to the local level — in Boyolali district, where 20,000 people have been evacuated and are living in temporary shelters, two senior officials have gone to Bali to “study electronic voting systems”.

The member organizations of the ARM are centrally involved in numerous struggles and campaigns in the Yogyakarta region. One organization the ARMP (Alliance of People's Struggles - Parangtritis) has been campaigning to stop the forced eviction of thousands of people from their homes in the nearby beach town of Parangtritis to make way for a huge new tourism resort. The ARMP has been struggling to stop the evictions since 2007, organizing regular demonstrations, public meetings and blockades. Another organization Security Guards Union - United Struggle of Labour Indonesia (SPK-PPBI) has been campaigning to reinstate more than 40 security guards who were unilaterally dismissed from their positions at Sapphir Square Mall. Recently after a series of demonstrations the campaign was successful in securing all the withheld wages. Many members of SPK-PPBI are currently helping to establish refugee camps for some of the thousands of people fleeing from the village of Cangkringan and two members of SPK-PPBI had had their homes destroyed by the Merapi eruptions.

In relation to the ARM's role in helping the victims of Merapi, Yayak, who is also a member of the Political Committee of the Poor - People's Democratic Party (KPRM-PRD) said, “While it is the government's responsibility to look after the victims of Merapi, it is clearly failing to do its job, so the people must act. The ARM has two main goals; first is to help distribute essential items to priority groups including children, pregnant women and the elderly. Secondly, to establish a monitoring and advocacy centre to ensure that government aid is reaching those in need as well as helping people to receive adequate compensation for reconstructing their homes and buying new livestock for their farms. The ARM is also campaigning for the government to provide free education and healthcare for the victims of Merapi. The ARM will also be organizing demonstrations to demand that the government fulfill its responsibility to the victims now and into the future”.

Please send messages of solidarity to:

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Donations can be made to:

Mandiri Bank Cabang Kediri
Account: 144-000-5472-979 Aslihul

Material donations of essential items, including milk, nappies, sanitary supplies, can be sent to:
Sekretariat Posko ARM: Asrama IKPM-Sumsel, JL. Bausasran, DN. 3 No. 595, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
